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ABSTRACT

Scholars in the field of comparative education offer a multitude of opinions regarding the field's theoretical state of health. This paper outlines three major shifts over the last 50 years that have mobilized theoretical perspectives. These theoretical orientations have been referred to as orthodoxy characterized by modernization theory, heterodoxy characterized by conflict theory, and heterogeneity characterized by globalism. The paper addresses the argument that theory is unimportant, arguing that theory is and will continue to be the important foundation for all comparative research. The document outlines the history of modernization and challenges to this orientation. It describes and relates globalization processes to the previous theoretical orientations. Finally, it discusses two implications of globalization for education, educational finance and standards. (Contains 11 references). (BT)

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Comparative Education: Globalization and Its Discontents.

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Comparative Education: Globalization and Its Discontents

Scholars in the field of comparative education offer a multitude of opinions regarding the field's theoretical state of health. Psacharopoulis (1990: 369) contends the reliance on any theoretical underpinning detracts from proper educational planning and policy. He would go so far as to say that the current problems in the field are largely due to theoretical semantics and that the substantive issues of educational progress can and should be had without theory. Many disagree with him that the point of comparative education research is to be policy oriented, or that theory is unwarranted. Bereday, Adams, Benson and Rust (Bereday 1964; Adams and Benson 1990; Rust 1999) would all take issue with Psacharopoulis at various points in his argument. These differences stem from the theoretical and methodological shifts over the last fifty years in the field of comparative education. Such differences lead one to conjecture what the future holds.

In this paper, I outline three major shifts over the last fifty years that have mobilized theoretical perspectives. These theoretical orientations have been referred to as orthodoxy characterized by modernization theory, heterodoxy characterized by conflict theory, and heterogeneity characterized by globalism. First, I address the argument that theory is unimportant. I argue that theory is and will continue to be the important foundation for all comparative research. Second, I outline the history of modernization and challenges to this orientation. Third, globalization processes are described and related to previous the theoretical orientations. Fourth, I discuss two implications of globalization for education, educational finance and standards.

If the main point of comparative education is for planning and policy making then Psacharopoulis contends that the field is misdirected in its use of theory as a guide. Psacharopoulis (370) states that the categories and labels, e.g. "hologeistic", "neo-positivist", "neo-Marxist", "ethnocentrist", are tightly linked with "soft-systems thinking and its interpretivist and relativist overtones". According to Psacharopoulos there are at least two reasons why this is bad for comparative educators. First, the qualitative connection focuses too much on semantic difference and semantics are not equivalent to analysis. Second, these differences do not address

the substantive problems facing ministers of education today. Ministers of education face substantive problems that demand practical solutions. The variety of problems stems from countries being at different stages of economic development. Some of these problems are increased access to primary education, improved school quality, expansion of post-primary and -secondary education, and equity of opportunity. Psacharopoulos concludes that time spent on semantics is time wasted in solving these problems. While quantitative work can be enhanced by the qualitative descriptions, by themselves these descriptive theories are of little value.

Like Psacharopoulis, Bereday believes the variety of theoretical starting points detracts from the power of the field. Rather than chucking them altogether though, Bereday (21) suggests that comparative education as a field would show more strength if there were rigorous training in one parent discipline, in particular, political science. This rigorous training in political science would give researchers needed strength to explore related disciplines. That is, all other disciplines become subsumed to political science in order to strengthen the field. Some of these other subsumed fields are philosophy, history, psychology, and anthropology. Political science with its traditional association to economics and business is more quantitative. Like Psacharopoulos, Bereday would endorse a quantitative orientation enhanced by qualitative work. However, this orientation would clearly have a theoretical framework originating from political science.

Benson and Adams agree in their criticism of Psacharopoulos. In general, Benson and Adams claim that the theoretical basis of modernization currently used by international agencies has produced colossal failures. Inefficiency and bureaucratic inadequacy mark these failures. Failure to recognize and use the many theories available (all of the neo-'s and -isms) led to a practical discontinuity between applying one theory (modernization) to all international educational problems. In particular, Benson (385) states that Psacharopoulos works from within the modernization theoretical framework and adopts the theory's characteristics of purporting to have a neutral and normative standpoint. Thus claiming his own neutral and normative stance, Psacharopoulos has insulated himself from having to acknowledge challenges from other viewpoints. Adams (383) claims he cannot maintain a neutral stance because any planning for educational reform represents either implicitly or explicitly a choice of theory and this choice has practical and value-laden consequences. Both Benson and Adams argue that the problems arising between the theory and practice mismatch are largely due to the inability of international agencies to recognize these contingencies. They conclude that comparative education ought to require and value the contributions of differing theories. The application of theory needs to be one that is reflexive, open to self-criticism and one that thoroughly examines terminology and assumptions.

The question is not whether or not theory is used and is valuable. Psacharopoulos, Bereday, Benson and Adams all both implicitly or explicitly rely on and value theory. The question has more to do with which theory and how theory is driving the field of comparative education. The following section outlines theoretical shifts that have occurred throughout the last fifty years in comparative education.

Researchers claim that the field of comparative education has been dominated by modernization theory, in spite of attacks from all sides against it. In this section, a historical perspective on the role of modernization theory is outlined. The focus and intentions of modernization theory have shifted in important ways over the last fifty years as a result from direct attacks against it, e.g. Post-modern and critical theories, and from indirect attacks from within it, e.g. globalization. Certainly this dichotomy of direct/indirect does not capture the variegated nature of post-modernism as I explicate below, yet it serves as a useful heuristic for purposes here.

There are two notions behind the idea of modernization. Generally, to be "modern" is to copy or emulate another. If others were copying you then you were modern and if others were copying you then they were trying to modernize. More specifically, to be "modern" is primarily connected to the time period associated in the Western tradition of industrialization after the 1750's to the present time. The people being emulated were those on the forefront of industrialized developments and political movements. The theory of modernization attempts to explain how it is that a society becomes modern. Modernization theory explains the transition in terms of a hierarchical progression through "natural" stages.

Early theorists postulated three evolutionary stages a society went through to become modern. The three stages that captivated the minds of sociological fathers were the primitive, the traditional and the modern stage. The primitive stage was of little interest to early sociologists other than representing a precursor state of existence that explained away all facts not captured by other stages. Traditional societies have been characterized as homogeneous, organic, community oriented or intuitive. Modern societies have been characterized as heterogeneous, mechanistic, contractual or rational. As a society moved toward an increased industrialized labor base and away from an agricultural labor base that society underwent structural and functional changes the affects of which are the characterizations described above. An underlying premise of modernization theory is the assumption that all persons in the "higher" level society shared common values and goals, hence, such a society strove for consensus and equilibrium in the march toward modernization.

Social theorists across time and countries postulated similar three-stage hierarchical arrangements while emphasizing different characteristics of each stage. For example, Spencer wrote after Darwin and

adopted Darwin's evolutionary ideas to describe changing societies. Spencer described societies that evolve from homogeneous simple structures and functions into societies that were heterogeneous with complex structures and functions. Durkheim focused on the effects of industrialization on a society, i.e. the mechanistic aspect to the changes in a society. He focused on the transition from an organic community based society to one that was more mechanistic having clock-like functions and regularities. Weber maintained that traditional society was marked more by intuition, habit and custom and rationalization and bureaucracy marked modern society. Mechanisms of modernism included compartmentalizing functions of society, e.g. law, morality, and aesthetics, and a focus on perpetual improvement and efficiency. Deutsch coined the term "social mobilization" in which he bracketed characteristics together as indicative of modernization. He bracketed all characteristics, i.e. heterogeneous, rational, contractual and mechanistic, and concluded that it would be difficult for one to become rational without also becoming mechanistic.

The hierarchical progression of societal stages and the characteristics distinctive to each type society are the hallmark features of modernization theory. Modernization theory has been the predominant guide for comparative education researchers for the last fifty years. Consistent with modernization theory was the methodological counterpart of positivism. Positivism asserts that nature and reality can be quantified, known objectively, and that science provides the one true perspective from which to produce legitimate knowledge.

During this time, other theories have been used but they have not significantly challenged the premises of modernization. Two theories are human capital and structural functionalism. Human capital theory focuses on the relationship between investment in humans and the net-effect on society. Generally, this is couched in economic terms and on input/output functionality. The role of education has been to assess economic growth in terms of how well educated a population is. The investment process and rate of economic return is referred to as human capital. Human capital theory stands within the construction of modernization and shores up certain premises of modernization's depiction of a modern industrialized society concerned with creating a skilled workforce and high-standard of Westernized living.

Structural functionalism, espoused by Talcott Parsons, had been a dominant sociological theory up until the 1960's. Structural functionalism claims that human sociology is like an organism which has a certain structure and parts with particular functions that make up that structure. An underlying premise is that such a society attempts to maintain homeostatis in crisis situations. A society reacts and does what is needed to bring harmony and equilibrium. Consequently, institutions in a society all have the same frame of reference to guide society toward equilibrium. The frame of reference is that in order to have a consensus all people must have the

same set of values, culture and concerns. Structural functionalism can be considered consistent with modernization because the natural progression of a society is toward a more industrialized and rationalized bureaucratic society. If one does not display those characteristics then the only other location for that person is in a traditional society but that would be moving backwards and the theory does not allow for that movement.

At least three objections to modernization theory and associated theories can be raised. Two arise because of the dichotomy between societal types. First, critics claim that it is not correct to lump all other societies together as traditional if they do not fit the modern characteristics. Even if all societies attempted to emulate Western styles, critics claim that all these societies express a multiplicity of perspectives, characteristics, and directions that cannot be captured by the term traditional. Therefore, modernization theory has erroneously characterized other societies. Second, even if a society can be characterized by traditional features, not all traditional societies would want to emulate Western style but prefer to continue their own traditions, thus, short-circuiting the notion of a natural progression in a second way. Modernization theory has erroneously imposed a hierarchically progressive relationship where none exists. Third, critics argue that the role of power is obviated in an equilibrium analysis. They point out that not all people have the same values, cultures or concerns. Therefore, striving for consensus is unrealistic and ignores the reality of deep-seated conflict between different cultures.

Starting in the 1970's and 1980's, two theories that challenged the modernization's framework of equilibrium were conflict and post-modern theory. Conflict theorists claim that conflict is the natural state of being not equilibrium. They focus on issues of power differentials, e.g. political and economic, between societies and how power informs relationships between societies. Dependency theory, a type of conflict theory, originated from developing countries in Latin America, not from the developed world. There are many dependency theories but the main feature of these is a relationship between core country and periphery countries. The core country is a developed country and the periphery countries are developing countries. The relationship between core and periphery is one-directional in terms of power and influence. The core country's social and cultural capital is so overwhelming that the developing peripheral countries have almost no resources to participate in the production of knowledge. Knowledge production and power flow from the developed country or core to the peripheral country. The power asymmetry creates a situation of dependency. Within education, dependency theory creates its own educational imperatives toward developing technological skills and vocational programs to compete within a world market. World systems is a variant of dependency theory. Dependency theory focused on one country in the context of another, world systems theory claims that one

cannot isolate systems from a global economic perspective. World systems is based on the notion "that the world is controlled and rules by capitalism, located in core nations, and rules by those who profit from the capitalist system. The rest of the world is located in the so-called periphery countries which are seen to be largely exploited and victimized by the core nations." (Rust, 1999. 5)

Post-modern theories challenge the positivist tradition and all traditions governed by metanarratives that claim to provide univocal and unattested knowledge. Post-modern theories posit that all knowledge is historically conditioned and reflect the exercise and effects of power. (Lyotard p. 13) Problems arise because structures, institutions and habits represent "texts and discourse practices" that impose interest-relative and incomplete values while claiming to be instrumental, objective and utilitarian. Different versions of post-modern theory would claim that there is no privileged position from which to adjudicate, or that a problem analyzed from multiple perspectives provides a more truthful assessment. Some post-modern theorists claim that final judgements, e.g. deciding the fate of an exploited group, cannot be made because the arbiter simply cannot know what it means to be a part of that group and, therefore, has no basis for judgement. From an educational perspective, post-modern theory calls into question any educational curriculum aligned with a hegemonic agenda, e.g. English as a second-language treated as a vocational subject in developing countries. Rather, a post-modern curriculum would include teaching readers to experience the text, produce multiple meanings, interpretations and criticisms. Readers would be taught to view the text not as a definitive work to be deciphered, but as an endless play containing multiple performances.

Aspects of all of these theories can be captured under the rubric of globalism. Globalism is a term that does not have a single definition. It can be examined from any angle and, thus, is an ambiguous concept to deal with. In a general sense, globalism can refer to the process in which happenings in distant locales make a difference in the lives of people in a local area. (Torres) However, even this general description can become tautological with a change in the unit of analysis. Below are outlined a few ways of describing theories of globalization and some implications for education.

Globalization processes have caused changes in society, culture, and economics in ways that have never been seen before. Global processes have heavily influenced changes in technology, changes in capital and changes in the mobility of labor. (Torres) No one theory of globalization that tries to account for the effects can capture the inherent ambiguity of the multitude of ongoing processes. Some theories of globalization say it has a homogenizing effect resulting from the imposition of capitalist logic. Other theories of globalization say it creates heterogeneity by circulating goods, ideas and culture creating new hybrids. For

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In discussing how to theorize globalization, I adopt a presentation structure draws a contrast between social theories of globalization and an ideology of globalization. (Morrow) First, one can discuss the enculturation process by which one becomes prepared to accept concepts of globalization. This process coincides with the history of humanity. Whenever there is a mutual exchange of language then a collective "we" becomes implicit in exchange. With the advent of universal religions there was for the first time a recognition that "others" outside of one's local geographical boundary would and could become similar subjects of a theology. In the general philosophy, universal notions can be found in Kant's ideal universal history and Hegel's world historical events. These notions serve as indicators that humanization as a universal process is one that unites the species, thus, preparing the conceptual ground for globalization.

A second way to begin to conceptualize globalization was with the development of social theories ranging from Marxist notions of capitalist imperialism to Wallerstein's notions of the formation of a world capitalist system. For Wallerstein this process began as early as 500 years ago with the penetration of markets into global regions. The world systems model provides a helpful way to conceptualize how a system responds to stimulation, e.g. political or economic, depending on a core or peripheral location. Morrow suggests that anthropologists act as early outposts of that process of commodification even though their own sensibilities are with the tribe. The anthropologists represent the first step toward market relations.

A third way to begin theorizing globalization is through popular media. Analysis of popular media begins with the post-industrial society and is distinctively a product of the development of capitalism. At a certain point there was a fundamental break in the nature of industrial development. Any theory that accounts for this break must be able to explain the changing nature of information, symbols and communications technology. For example, Castells' presents a region-by-region analysis of economic and cultural data to create a coherent picture of the forces driving civilization at the end of the 20th century. Castells' key observation is that electronic networks have emerged as the dominant organizing principle of the new age. Information and knowledge for Castells form "the networked society".

The assumption behind these analyses is that there is something fundamentally different happening that requires a new periodization of history. (Kellner) Post-modern theories offer a range of analysis on how best to bridge the transition. Some post-modern theorists claim continuity between the old and new periods. They claim that capitalism is still the fundamental feature of the forms of production and that commodification and market relations are still the primary determinants of social relations. Some post-modern theorists claim a discontinuity between the old and new periods. The new period is a qualitatively different form of society. The old categories and critiques of capitalism are no longer important in the same ways. There is a massive restructuring of capital that is intimately related to high-speed communications technology. The nature of capital has changed as well as the relationship between capital and technology and, therefore, the economy and social relations. What is needed is a new social theory for the post-capitalist society.

The social theorizations described above can be contrasted to the ideology of globalization as found in the media. Morrow says what emerges from the media is a convergence of interests and practical perspectives that are associated with transcontinental corporate elites. These people do not see themselves as ideologists. It is just that their practical experience borne from business school training and international travel help to create a vision of the world that reflects these realities. Morrow claims that this vision is reflective of the economic theory of society that is taught in economics departments. According to Morrow, traditional economic theory is the most powerful social theory in the world. An econometric assumption is that a person can be operationalized as an abstracted individual with consumer utility. Economic theory is built around a technological imperative that flows from an industrialized society. Concomitant to this view is that any society that does not aspire to these goals and assumptions is backward or foolish. One can see elements of

modernization, namely the hierarchical progression toward modern society and objective neutrality, lurking in the background of this theory.

Morrow, Kellner, Benson and Adams would all claim that one couldn't be outside of a hegemonic system and claim theoretical neutrality. Once you are in the system you are compromised and play by the rules of that system whether or not this is overtly or covertly acknowledged.

Within the ambiguous clutch of globalization, the ideology of globalization dominates discourse space and tends to have the greater effect on education. Two effects on education are the changes in educational finance and educational standards. Torres described the challenge to educational finance due to a hegemonic agenda forwarded by multi-national organizations, e.g. World Bank. Organizations portrayed the public educational system as a system in crisis, and they identified the means to remedy the situation. Privatization would solve the inefficiencies of public education through increased competition. Vouchers, charter schools and magnet school programs are early examples of competition. The effect of increased privatization would solve state fiscal crisis as well as the problems in schools. For higher education, the economic logic of the corporate model of increased efficiency, profit and career advancement will be pushed onto educational systems. Public education will become commodified through packaged curricular materials and distance learning that replace teachers. In addition, entrepreneurial ventures between industry and academia will be encouraged and resulting new knowledge will be protected and confidential. Joint ventures will disrupt the free-flow of information as inventions and discoveries become confidential company secrets. Intellectual property will become more of a premium than ever before.

A second implication for education is the role of educational standards. There is a growing movement to internationalize standards and that these standards are used more as a system of political control rather than to push through educational reform. The end effect is a homogenization of education. The logic can be traced to free trade agreements. (Rust, 1997) Free trade agreements rarely assign a high priority to education as an international issue except in the case of science and research related endeavors. Such endeavors are related to a country's economic positioning in the global marketplace. Countries are encouraged to participate in international standards organizations with a view towards harmonizing individual countries' technical regulations. Organizations included may focus on standardizing a particular product, i.e. cotton, or medicine, to organizations that hope to standardize acceptable practices and nomenclature in fields of study. (Phipps: 14) These organizations and their stated missions outline desired results without stating the process of to achieve

those results. By and large, from plowing to physics what this means is that there will be a standardization of the educational process by which laboratory assistants, farmers, and physicists come to know the practices/activities of their chosen field in such a way that their skills are transferable across national, regional, and international boundaries. Standardization poses a challenge to us, as does globalization in general. In this case, it seems that some non-elected governance body will become imbued within the national architecture of a country's educational system. The result can be standardization or homogenization of an educational system.

To say that you are against the global economy is like saying that you are against the weather. It's not a question of whether or not this economy will happen, but a question of the global economy on whose terms. What is at stake is how we theorize globalization, and how we claim a theoretical orientation that allows us to repudiate or adjudicate our responsibility.

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